


NEWBERY MEDAL-WINNING AUTHOR OF CRISPIN

~AVI~

Poppy



*Can a tiny deer mouse
outwit her biggest enemy?*

ILLUSTRATED BY *Brian Floca*

Mr. Ocax

A thin crescent moon, high in the sky, shed faint white light over Dimwood Forest. Stars glowed. Breezes full of ripe summer fragrance floated over nearby meadow and hill. Dimwood itself, veiled in darkness, lay utterly still.

At the very edge of this forest stood an old charred oak on which sat a great horned owl. The owl's name was Mr. Ocax, and he looked like death himself.

Mr. Ocax's eyes—flat upon his face—were round and yellow with large ebony pupils that enabled him to see as few other creatures could. Moonlight—even faint moonlight—was as good as daylight for him.

With his piercing gaze, Mr. Ocax surveyed the lands he called his own, watching for the comings and goings of the creatures he considered his subjects—and his dinners. He looked at Glitter Creek, home to the fish he found so appetizing; the Tar Road, across which tasty rabbits were known to

hop; Jayswood, where meaty chipmunks sometimes skittered before dawn. By swiveling his head he searched the Marsh for a savory frog, then New Field, where, usually, he could count on a delicious vole or two. He looked at Gray House, where Farmer Lamout used to live, then upon the Old Orchard. He even looked, nervously, toward New House. But nowhere did he see a thing to eat. Profoundly annoyed, Mr. Ocax was beginning to think he would have no dinner that night.

But finally, there—near the top of Bannock Hill, where the ponderosa pines had all been cut, where only a few struggling saplings and bushes grew—he saw movement. Just the glimmer of food was enough to cause his owl's heart to pound, his curved black beak to clack, his feathered horns to stand up tall.

Mr. Ocax shifted his head from right to left, forward and back. When he did so, he beheld . . . two mice! Of all the creatures the owl hunted, he enjoyed mice the most. They were the best eating, to be sure, but better still, they were the most fearful, and Mr. Ocax found deep satisfaction in having others afraid of him. And here, after a wait of nearly the whole night, were two savory subjects to terrify before he ate them.

One of the two, a deer mouse, crouched cautiously beneath a length of rotten bark. The other, a golden mouse, stood in the open on his hind legs, his short tail sticking straight out behind for

balance. From his left ear an earring dangled. In his paws he held a hazelnut.

"It's not as if I haven't warned these mice," Mr. Ocax murmured to himself. "If they will move about without my permission, they have only themselves to blame for the consequences." As he leaned forward to listen, his sharp-as-needles talons, four to each large claw and jet-black at their tips, cut deeply into the branch he was perched on. "Catching these two mice," he mused, "is going to be fun."

ON BANNOCK HILL, the golden mouse turned to his timid companion and said, "Poppy, girl, this hazelnut is bad-to-the-bone. Bet you seed to sap there's more where it came from. Come on out and dig."

"Ragweed," Poppy replied as she sniffed tensely in all directions, "you promised we'd dance when we got here. We can't do it in the open. Besides, I want to answer your question. So will you *please* get under here with me."



The Gray House mice need a hero.



*A*T THE VERY EDGE OF DIM-wood forest stood an old charred oak. A great horned owl waited there. With his piercing gaze, he surveyed the lands he called his own, watching for the creatures he considered his subjects. None of them dared cross his path, until the terrible night when two little mice went dancing in the moonlight. . . .

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